

City of San Antonio



Minutes Community Health Committee

2023 – 2025 Council Members

Chair: Teri Castillo, Dist. 5

Dr. Sukh Kaur, Dist. 1 | Phyllis Viagran, Dist. 3

Dr. Adriana Rocha Garcia, Dist. 4 | Marina Alderete Gavito, Dist. 7

Thursday, September 28, 2023

2:00 PM

City Hall

The Community Health Committee convened a regular meeting in the City Hall Media Briefing Room beginning at 2:03 PM. City Clerk Debbie Racca-Sittre took the Roll Call noting a quorum with the following Committee Members present:

Members Present: Teri Castillo, *Chair*
Dr. Adriana Rocha Garcia, *Member*
Marina Alderete Gavito, *Member*
Members Absent: Dr. Sukh Kaur, *Member*
Phyllis Viagran, *Member*

Approval of Minutes

1. Approval of minutes from the Community Health Committee meeting on August 21, 2023.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia moved to Approve the minutes of the August 21, 2023 Community Health Committee. Councilmember Alderete Gavito seconded the motion. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: Castillo, Rocha Garcia, Alderete Gavito
Absent: Kaur, Viagran

Public Comments

There were no members of the public signed up to speak.

Briefing and Possible Action on

2. **Briefing on COVID-19 Updates for San Antonio.** [Erik Walsh, City Manager; Claude A. Jacob, Director, Metro Health]

Miguel Cervantes, Public Health Administrator with Metro Health, reported that the incidents of COVID-19 cases had been trending down over the past month, however, he cautioned that new variants were beginning to circulate even though these seemed to cause less severe illness. Cervantes stated that the United States Centers for Disease Control (CDC) had requested an updated vaccine to cover the new variants and the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) approved the new vaccine on September 11, 2023.

Cervantes stated that the vaccines were available through the usual routes as other vaccines through health insurance at no cost, and those without insurance would be covered through CDC's Bridge to Access Program which was under contract with CVS and Walgreens Pharmacies. He stated that Metro Health planned to host pop-up vaccination clinics around San Antonio and at its Immunization Clinic. He reported that the guidance to protect from COVID-19 was the same as previously which included individuals knowing their risk, protecting themselves, taking action if exposed and taking action with their healthcare provider if sick or testing positive. Cervantes mentioned that home tests would be distributed again.

DISCUSSION:

Chair Castillo was hopeful that the new variant was not as deadly or dangerous. She asked if Metro Health had explained how to self-report. Cervantes commented that self-reporting was not included in Metro Health's data.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia stated that she had heard about rising cases recently and asked why other providers besides CVS and Walgreens Pharmacies were not providing free vaccines. Cervantes commented that the Federal Government was looking to add more providers.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito asked whether any schools were mandating COVID vaccination. Cervantes stated that vaccines were not being required by schools. Councilmember Alderete Gavito expressed concern that many parents had objected to the COVID vaccine and it was causing children to go unvaccinated for other illnesses so she recommended increased outreach regarding other vaccines. Cervantes mentioned that Metro Health was hosting the pop up clinics and providing education.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito asked how long a person should be quarantined if they had COVID-19. Cervantes stated that the quarantine recommended was for 10 days after being tested or getting sick. Councilmember Alderete Gavito asked whether it was advisable to get the COVID and Flu shot at the same time. Cervantes stated that getting both vaccines was recommended.

Chair Castillo asked whether the City's testing site was still open. Cervantes was unsure and stated that he would check.

Item was for briefing only so no action was taken.

3. Update on recycling in San Antonio. [David McCary, Assistant City Manager; David Newman, Director, Solid Waste Management Department]

Josephine Valencia, Assistant Director of the Solid Waste Management Department (SWMD), provided an overview of the Recycling Program and stated that the goal was weight based for single family homes in order to divert waste from the landfill by recycling. Valencia provided the history of the Recycling Program which began in 2007 which progressed to a 36% diversion rate for residential homes.

Valencia stated that SWMD completed periodic audits of garbage and if all that was eligible for recycling or composting was diverted, the City would have a diversion rate of 58%. Valencia explained that many recycled materials had gotten lighter so the department had recommended moving from a weight based goal to a capture rate focusing on quality versus quantity. Valencia reported that the prices for recycling fluctuated widely and noted that nothing actually got recycled unless the materials were sold.

Valencia provided information on the new contract that was to begin in August 2024 which, while similar to the existing contract in financial structure, included a new education center. She noted that single use plastic bags would not be accepted in the cart because plastic bags tended to get caught up in the machinery and they were dirty from comingling in the SWMD cart. Valencia added that the department planned an education campaign which included new stickers for the blue recycling carts and door hangers.

DISCUSSION:

Chair Castillo recommended incentivizing businesses that used reusable bags and commented that single use plastic bags were littering our streets, parks and waterways. Chair Castillo supported more outreach and education, particularly targeted to school children.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito agreed that education was key and sometimes knowing what items could be recycled was confusing. Valencia stated that the Recycling Inspection Program had been restructured and was planned to become more education focused so as to not discourage people because it was too complicated. Councilmember Alderete Gavito asked whether glass was still recyclable. Valencia stated that glass was expensive to recycle and did not bring income but it was still accepted.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito mentioned that the City of Brownsville had banned plastic bags. Valencia stated that the City of Brownsville had banned plastic bags but they had to rescind their Ordinance because the State of Texas passed subsequent legislation preempting cities from banning plastic bags.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito noted that sometimes janitorial services would mix all the items into one can even if workers separated their recycling. Valencia stated that the department's ReWorx Program targeted businesses. Councilmember Alderete Gavito asked what a resident should do if their green organics or blue recycle cart was not picked up. Valencia stated that the process was for residents to call 3-1-1 if they had a missed pickup. Councilmember Alderete Gavito suggested that staff take an extra step to meet residents where they were.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia expressed excitement that the new recycling facility, including an educational component, would be located in Council District 4. Councilmember Rocha Garcia noted that the department had some books that were excellent for education and asked about future books. Valencia stated that there was a new book coming out focusing on safety.

Councilmember Rocha Garcia asked when SWMD would stop accepting plastic bags and whether gift bags could be recycled. Valencia stated that the new contract did not include plastic bags and gift bags could be recycled but the string handle needed to be removed; noting the department would do a holiday campaign surrounding gift wrap and gift bags.

Assistant City Manager David McCary stated that if residents called SWMD directly, the department would take care of the call, however, they could be more responsive if residents called 3-1-1.

Chair Castillo commented that even shipped items came with plastic cushions inside the boxes and recommended education regarding how these plastic cushions could be recycled by including them in their plastic bags returned to the grocery store.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito stated that council district offices offered to help get the word out about recycling. Valencia stated that staff would provide educational and promotional materials to the council district offices.

Item was for briefing only so no action was taken.

Consent Agenda

Adjournment

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 2:42 p.m.

Approved

Teri Castillo, Chair

Debbie Racca-Sittre, City Clerk